

THE MONASTERY OF ST. CONSTANTINE ON LAKE APOLYONT

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The town of Apollonia ad Rhyndacum (Apolyont) has received scant attention from Byzantine scholars. Classical archeologists and epigraphists have shown more interest in this picturesque site which has yielded a considerable number of inscriptions, but the only comprehensive survey remains that of P. Le Bas, who visited Apollonia as long ago as 1843.¹

The ancient town was built on a peninsula projecting from the north shore of Lake Apolloniatis and consisting of two hills. The larger of the two (called at one time the hill of St. George) is joined to the mainland by a narrow isthmus across which remains of a Byzantine wall may still be seen. The second hill, which contains the modern settlement and is walled all round, becomes an island when the water of the lake is high; it is accessible by a bridge. It would seem that in the Early Byzantine period the town contracted to the second hill (or island) which became the *kastron* of Apollonia(s)² and was the seat of a bishopric subject to the metropolis of Nicomedia. Its walls are well preserved and date from different periods. The original construction is pre-Byzantine (possibly Hellenistic), but it was extensively repaired in the Middle Ages with the help of spolia extracted from public buildings of the imperial Roman age. In the late eleventh century Apollonia was briefly occupied by the Seldjuks and was unsuccessfully besieged by the Byzantine

general Alexander Euphorbenos, who managed to take "the outhier enceinte outside the *kastron*," i.e., the wall guarding the isthmus of St. George, before he was forced to retreat. A second Byzantine expedition under the command of Opos succeeded in capturing the town.³ After the Ottoman conquest Apollonia retained its predominantly Greek character until the exchange of populations in the early 1920's.

To the west and southwest of Apollonia are several islands (fig. A). The biggest of these, called Halilbey adası, had, according to Le Bas, a medieval fort. Next in size is an elongated island which used to be known as that of St. Constantine after a monastery situated at its northern end. Today this island is uninhabited and uncultivated, but at the beginning of the century it had upward of 3,000 olive trees tended by the monks.⁴ Fortunately, the monastic church has survived and it deserves a brief description.

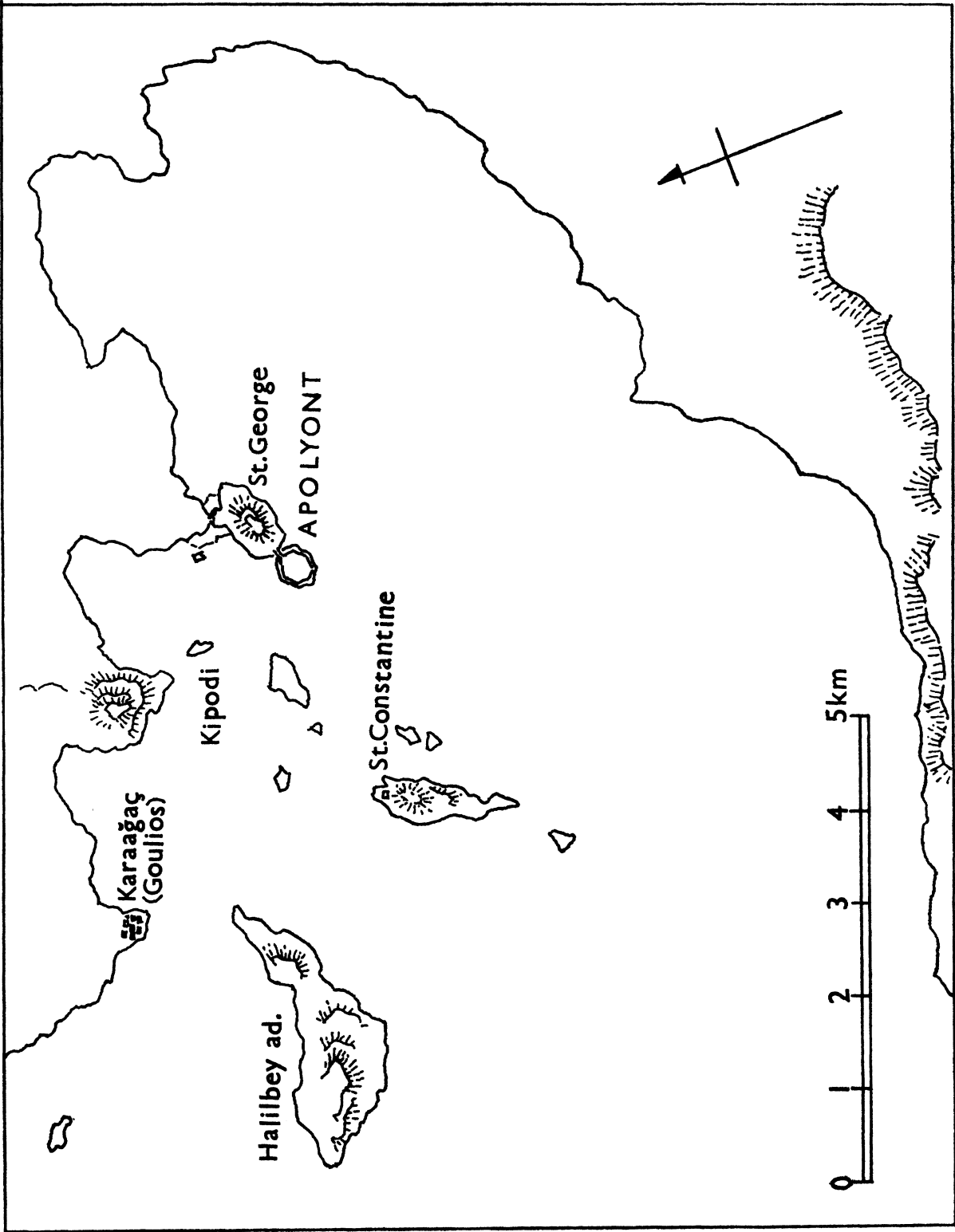
The fabric of the church stands nearly to its full height, less the dome which has collapsed. The plan (fig. B) is that of a cross inscribed in a rectangle, the eastern and western arms terminating in semicircular apses. The corner compartments, which must have been only half the height of the nave, were either vaulted or covered with subsidiary domes. It may be noted that the pilasters set into the outer corners of the main piers continued above the roofing of the corner compartments and were carried up to the dome base (figs. 1, 4, 5, 6). The original masonry (fig. 8), visible in many places, consists of five consecutive courses of brick (the bricks measure about 0.34 × 0.047 m.) alternating with bands of roughly squared stone, the latter to a height of about 0.90 m. The mortar joints between

¹ "Voyage en Asie-Mineure," *RPh*, 1 (1845), 39 ff.; amplified in *Voyage archéologique en Grèce et en Asie Mineure*, ed. S. Reinach (Paris, 1888), 38 ff., pls. 45-49, 135.3, *Archit.*, pls. II.1-2. See also W. J. Hamilton, *Researches in Asia Minor* (London, 1842), II, 87 ff.; F. W. Hasluck, *Cyzicus* (Cambridge, 1910), 68 ff.; A. Mesitides and B. Delegiannes, 'Η Ἀπολλωνιάς, in *Μικρασιατικά Χρονικά*, 3 (1940), 420 ff. Approximate sketch map of Lake Apolyont is found in *Μικρ Χρον.*, 6 (1955), 213.

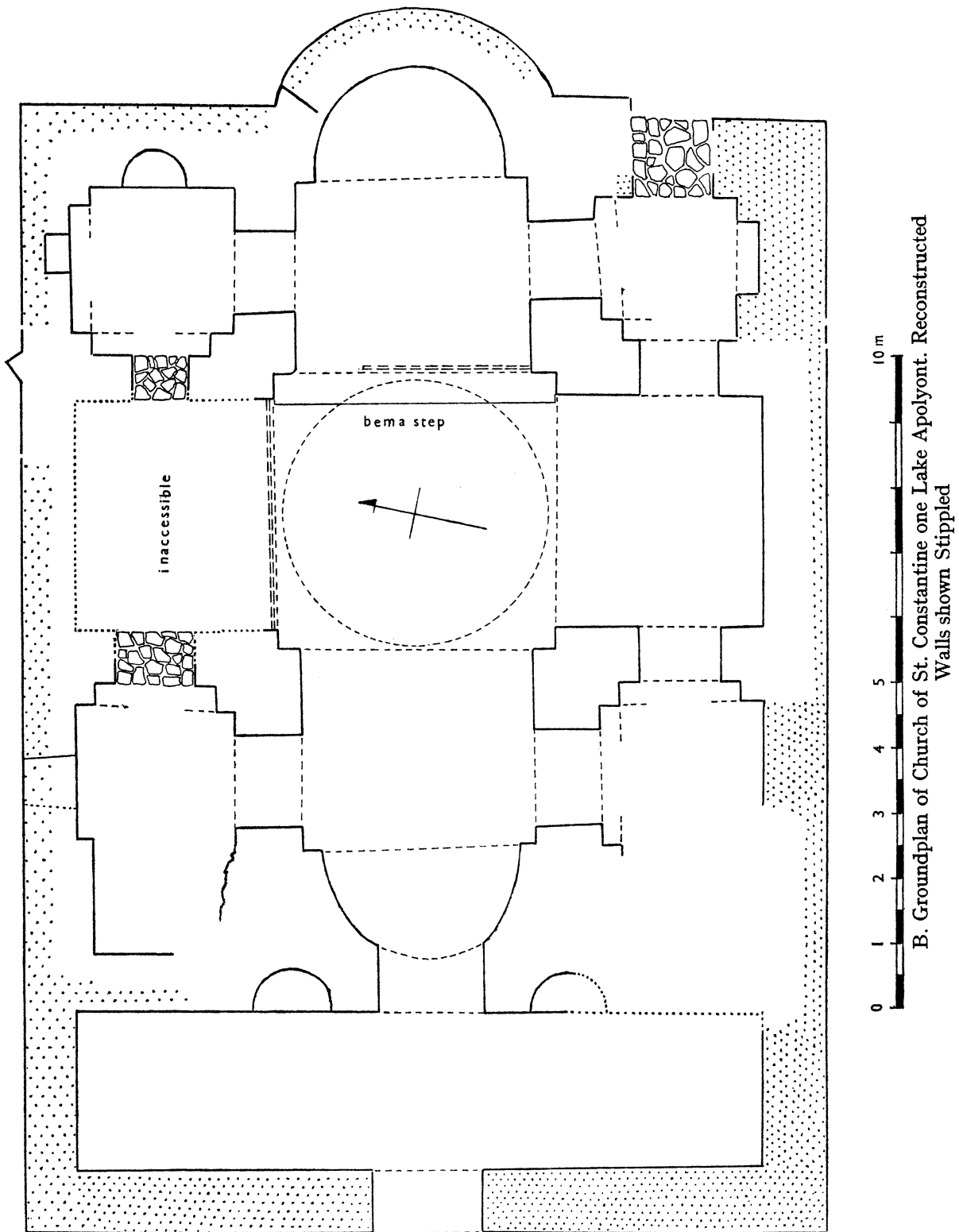
² Theophanes, ed. de Boor, 465.8. Cf. 375.1.

³ Anna Comnena, VI.13, ed. Leib, II, 79-81.

⁴ Mesitides and Delegiannes, *op. cit.*, 430.



A. Sketch Map of Eastern Part of Lake Apolyont



the courses of brick are 0.05. m thick. Two deep and tall niches enliven the west wall of the nave. The floor of the church must have been of *opus sectile*, as indicated by the presence of small pieces of red porphyry, verd antique, and Proconnesian marble. Traces of other monastic buildings may be seen to the north and east of the church.

At a relatively recent period, perhaps in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century (a time of considerable building activity on the part of Greek communities in Turkey), the church was subjected to an extensive restoration. The scope of the repairs suggests that it had previously been derelict and unroofed. Practically the entire exterior of the building was redone at this juncture in a rough rubble masonry reinforced with wooden ties. The entrance door of the narthex was given an ogee arch in the Ottoman style (fig. 3). The western semidome (fig. 9) and probably the eastern one, too, were reconstructed. No attempt was made to reestablish the original vaulting of the corner compartments, which must have been covered with some kind of shed roof at a higher level (see fig. 7), and the diaconicon, in particular, was partly rebuilt with a large niche in its south wall (fig. 2).

There is, unfortunately, no carving that appears to be contemporary with the original construction of the church: the continuous marble cornice that ran round the nave at the springing of the arches (fig. 9) as well as circled the dome base is plain. Several carved pieces that are lying either inside the church or in the forecourt to the west of it have been brought from elsewhere. These include two fragments of fluted column shafts and three plain ones; an ionic impost capital of the fifth century (fig. 10) decorated with a cross and a finely cut band of egg-and-dart between the volutes (height 0.30 m., top measurements when complete 0.58×0.80 m.); a much rougher impost capital of sixth-century type (fig. 11) decorated with discs and, presumably, crosses which have been defaced (height 0.34 m., diameter at base 0.30 m., top measurements 0.46×0.49 m.); a couple of column bases, etc. There is also, to the west of the church, a large fragment of a late antique funerary

inscription in the name of one Codrus⁵ and a relative called Marcus.

The literary evidence bearing on the history of our monastery is extremely scanty. The dedication to St. Constantine can be traced back to the sixteenth century; at that time there were six or seven monks in residence.⁶ For the medieval period there are, if I am not mistaken, only two pieces of evidence, both of them ambiguous. The first concerns St. Ioannikios, who in 825 went to pay his respects to the relics of St. Theophanes Confessor in the latter's monastery of Megas Agros.⁷ On his way back to the Bithynian Olympus he skirted the north shore of Lake Apolloniatis and was met by one Daniel, abbot of the monastery of the island of Thasios, who implored the saint to deliver him of the snakes that were infesting his establishment. Ioannikios accordingly took a boat to the island and forced the snakes to depart to the south shore of the lake.⁸ The memory of Daniel, whose exploits are otherwise unrecorded, was celebrated on 12 September.⁹ Our second piece of evidence concerns Arsenios Autoreianos who, before being appointed patriarch (1255), had been a monk "on one of the islands of Lake Apollonias."¹⁰ If the island Thasios was the same as that of St. Constantine, our monastery was in existence by 825, but even if that was the case, we have no assurance

⁵ The name Codrus occurs in another funerary inscription of Apollonia: Hasluck, *op. cit.*, 279, no. 82.

⁶ S. Gerlach, *Türkisches Tagebuch* (Frankfurt, 1674), 257.

⁷ On which see C. Mango and I. Ševčenko, "Some Churches and Monasteries on the Southern Shore of the Sea of Marmara," *DOP*, 27 (1973), 253 ff.

⁸ *Vita* by Sabas, *BHG*³, no. 935, 360; *Vita* by Peter, *ibid.*, no. 936, 405. Cf. R. Janin, *Les églises et les monastères des grands centres byzantins* (Paris, 1975), 153–54.

⁹ *Synaxarium CP*, 38.14; cf. 948–49. The *akolouthia* of St. Daniel, published by K. Doukakes, in *Μέγας συναξαριστής*, Sept. (Athens, 1889), 136–49, is a modern fabrication. Its fantasies have been repeated by B. Menthon, *L'Olympe de Bithynie* (Paris, 1935), 209–11.

¹⁰ Skoutariotes, *Synopsis*, in K. N. Sathas, *Μεσαιωνική βιβλιοθήκη*, VII (Venice, 1894), 511. C. f. G. Acropolita, ed. Heisenberg, I, 107.

that the existing monastic church goes back to that date.

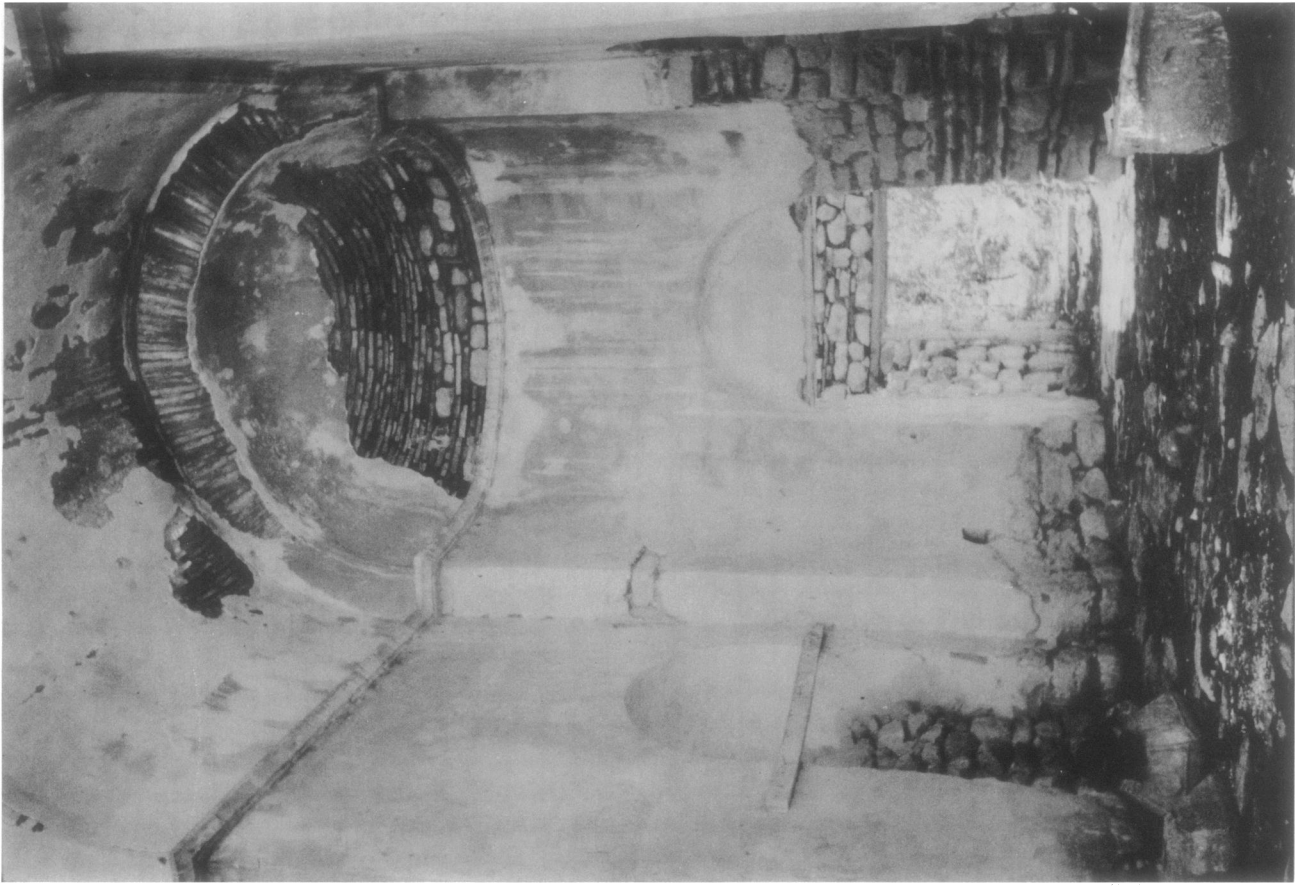
For the present, the main interest attaching to the church of St. Constantine concerns its architectural form. I know of no other Byzantine example of an inscribed cross type with apses to east and west. The inscribed cross with three square ends and an eastern apse is, of course, a well-known formula, current already in the fifth century (e.g., "Hosios David" at Thessaloniki), but its role in Middle Byzantine architecture remains unclear and controversial. The redating of the Kalenderhane Camii to the Comnenian period has removed what had once been regarded as a key witness to the transition from Early to Middle Byzantine forms. Two other important specimens of the inscribed cross type, namely, the Atik Mustafa

Paşa Camii ("SS. Peter and Mark") at Istanbul and St. Clement at Ankara (eliminating the gallery and its supports), are undated, although I would be inclined to place the latter closer to the sixth than to the ninth century. It is, I believe, in this architectural context that St. Constantine's has its place. Its Middle Byzantine date is beyond doubt, and, in view of its masonry technique, it appears to be earlier than the Comnenian period. An attribution to the ninth or tenth century would not be unreasonable. St. Constantine's would repay a more careful examination than I have been able to give it in the course of two brief visits.¹¹

¹¹ For assistance in surveying the building I should like to thank my wife as well as Messrs. W. R. B. Saunders and L. M. Whitby.

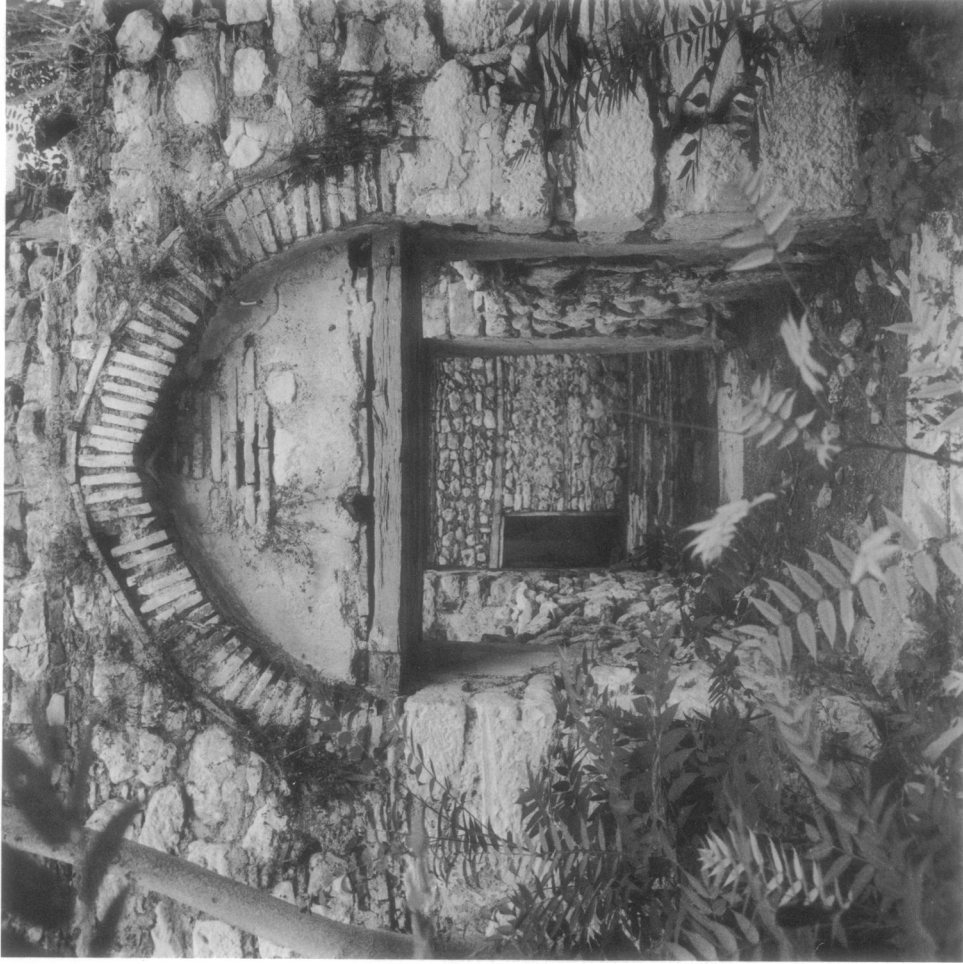


1. Exterior, Southeast Corner



2. Interior, looking West

Church of St. Constantine on Lake Apolyont



3. West Door of Narthex, looking into Nave

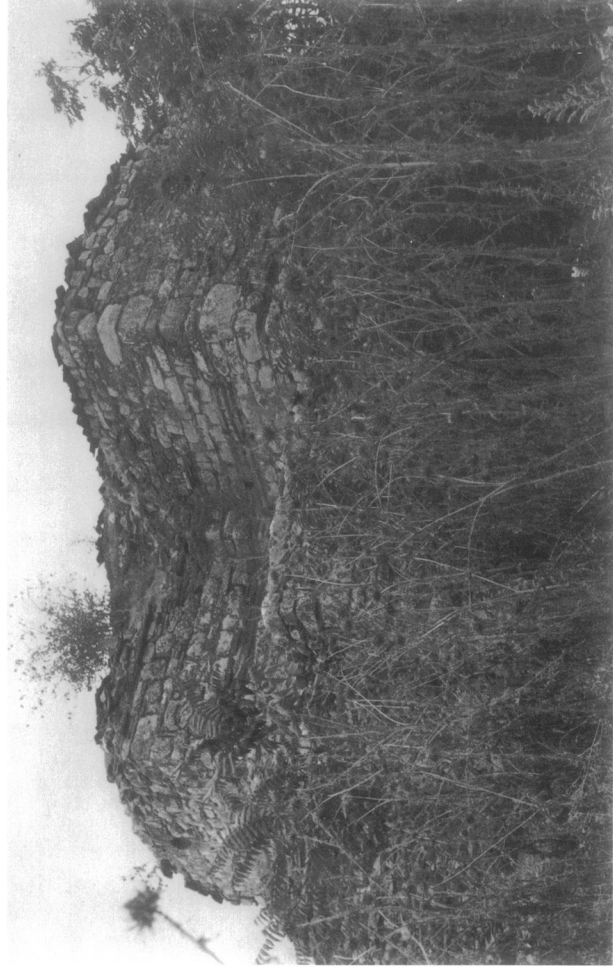


4. Northwest Corner

Church of St. Constantine on Lake Apolyont



5. Diaconicon, looking Northwest



6. Exterior, Northeast Corner



7. Southwest Corner Compartment, looking East

Church of St. Constantine on Lake Apolyont



8. Interior, Original Masonry in South Wall
of West Apse



9. Interior, West Apse



10. Ionic Impost Capital



11. Impost Capital
Church of St. Constantine on Lake Apolyont